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DEVELOPMENT OF THE RICHMOND CATHOLIC PAROCHIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

J.A. Briggs, Jr.

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- #7. Catholic Almanac, 1834-1856.
- #8. The Catholic Directory, 1864-1933.
- #9. The Catholic Encyclopedia, Robert Appleton Company, New York, 1912.
- #10. Personal information was received from the following individuals:  
Rev. Father Byrne, Superintendent of Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Richmond.  
Rt. Rev. Monsignor Felix F. Kaup.  
Rev. Cornelius Diehl.  
Rev. Wm. O'Hara.  
Rev. T.E. O'Connell.  
Rev. L.A. Rowen.
- #11. Gee, Wikson-Carson, John J., A Statistical Study of Virginia, The Institute for Research in the Social Sciences, University, Virginia, 1927.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE RICHMOND CATHOLIC PAROCHIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM.

The Catholic School System is a result of over one hundred years of gradual development. The present organization is of comparatively recent date. However, from the first school inaugurated in 1824, to the last one in 1924, the Catholic schools have run hand in hand with the Catholic Church. "The individual school, though a distinct unit in itself, has been an inseparable part of the Catholic School System in the diocese, and, furthermore, of the Apostolate of the Catholic Church in the State".

Catholic education in Richmond has been handicapped, not only because of the status of the Catholic Church, but also in consideration of the following factors:

1. The progress of secular education has been retarded in Richmond "since the public schools occupy a position of prestige and advantage, owing to their relation to the State and their numerical preponderance, it might be expected that the academic standards, curricula, text-books, etc. of

- 1. The Catholic Almanac, 1934.
- 2. The Catholic Directory, 1932.
- 3. Byrne, Rev. Francis J., Diocesan Superintendent.  
(Personal interview)

the parish school would tend to conform to the public schools." <sup>#4.</sup>  
In view of this statement, it is apparent that the Public School standard has an influence upon the Parochial School, and "Virginia, which includes Richmond, ranks well down the list in the field of education as compared to her sister States. The Old Dominion has an average rank of thirty-sixth in a study of the significant items under this heading. This position is arrived at by averaging the numerical rank of the State in fourteen different items. In most States of the field, Virginia ranks well to the fore among the thirteen Southern States, all of which, up until recently, have lagged far behind the other sections of the country" <sup>#5.</sup> An awakening of the educational consciousness of Virginia has been commensurate with the recent commercial progress of the State. Just as the above is true about Virginia, so is it true about Richmond.

2. There are relatively few Catholics in the State.

"In 1930 the State population numbered 2,421,851, whereas the Catholic population, 38,443, was only 1.6 per cent of the former. The scarcity of Catholics in this State may be attributed to the Penal laws in the Colonial days

- 4. Byrne, Rev. Francis J., Diocesan Superintendent.  
(Personal interview)
- 5. A Statistical Study of Virginia.

and to the fact that there has been practically no immigration in the South. The penal legislation against the Catholic Church in Virginia from the settlement at Jamestown in 1607 to the adoption of the Federal Constitution of 1787, is to be found in a series of enactments against the presence of 'Papacy' in the Colony. And, the foreign born population of the South is so small as scarcely to be worth considering, being in some States less than one per cent.<sup>#6.</sup>"

(3). In general, organization has been further impeded because of numbers and poor financial assistance.

I will now attempt to discuss the Development and Organization of the Catholic School System as it stands today.

To understand just how the Parochial Schools of Richmond run, it would be well to see just how the Parochial Schools throughout the State function.

The development of the Catholic School System in the Diocese of Richmond corresponds to that of the development of the Catholic School System through the United States. "Beginning with the small parochial school or private institute, which functioned practically as an individual unit, the school

machinery was very simple. The Bishop of the Diocese, as head of the Diocesan Schools, depended upon the Pastor for the direct supervision of the Parish School, whereas the latter shares his authority as head of the Parochial School with the local superior who was in most instances responsible for the administration of the school. In general this plan served until the second Plenary Council in 1866, which event marked a new era in the Catholic Educational System, an era that was characterized by the efforts made to develop and perfect, as well as to extend, the existing system."<sup>#7.</sup>

"In Virginia because of the small number of Catholics, and owing to the fact that State requirements were not as stringent as in the more prosperous Northern States, the organization as it existed in the larger Catholic dioceses of the United States was delayed until the third decade of the twentieth century."<sup>#8.</sup>

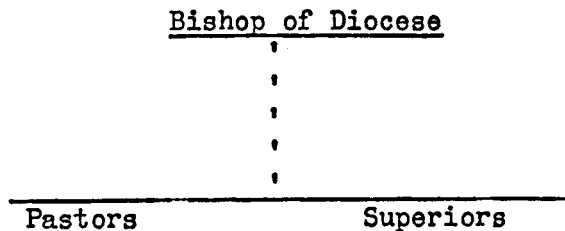
It must be understood that the completeness of the organization, even now, has not attained the efficiency possible in larger dioceses.

- 7. Burns, Rev. J.A., The Growth and Development of the Catholic School System in the U.S. , P.5  
-8. Kivlinghan, Parish School, P.17.

Table 1. Catholic School Examiners

Year	Examiners	Districts
1886-1892	Rev. M.F. Dinneen, SS.	
	Rev. Chas. Donahoe	
1908-1920	Rev. Wm. A. McKeefry	Northern & Western
	Rev. James E. Collins	
	Rev. Edward M. Walsh	Southern & Eastern
	Rev. Thomas A. Rankin	
1920	Rev. Wm. A. McKeefrey	Northern & Western
	Rev. Jos. Frioli	
	Rev. Thomas A. Rankin	Southern & Eastern
	Rev. Thomas E. Waters	
1922	Rev. Wm. A. McKeefrey	Northern & Western
	Rev. Thomas A. Rankin	
	Rev. Thomas E. Waters	Southern & Eastern
1930	School Examiners extinct	

PLAN OF PAST ORGANIZATION



This table was drawn up by Fr. Byrne, Superintendent of Catholic Parochial Schools in Virginia.



The table shows that provision was made for the supervision of all diocesan parochial schools prior to the appointment of a superintendent of schools, and that in 1886 annual school reports were forwarded by the School Examiners to the Bishop. In 1910 two Virginia pastors were delegated to act as School Examiners in the Northern and Western sections of the State, and two in the Southern and Eastern districts. The division was maintained and these School Examiners served as an intermediary between the Bishop and Pastors until 1929 when, due to the appointment of a Catholic Diocesan Superintendent of Schools, the offices of School Examiners became extinct.

In some specific functions, the Parochial School must legally conform and be directed by the State Education law. For example, in Virginia "the schools of white and colored are separate." The State law provides for the incorporation of denominational schools. The Catholic School as a denominational one is legally endorsed, yet, although independent, she is not entirely uninfluenced by the State Board of Education, the State Board of Health, and the Virginia Commission of Accredited Schools." #9.

"Two enactments of the State Board of Education that have

#9. Byrne, Rev. Francis J., Diocesan Superintendent, (Personal Interview).

vitally affected the Parochial Schools are, the Compulsory Attendance Law, and the 7-4 Plan, which means seven year elementary and four year high school." #10. "The most influential factor in proper school enrollment and school attendance is an adequate compulsory attendance law with binding provisions for its constant and rigid enforcement. The present compulsory attendance law was enacted in 1922 and became effective in 1923." #11.

The 7-4 plan, supra, was prevalent in the Catholic Educational System until 1933, when Bishop Brennan ordered the 8-4 plan, which means eight year elementary and four year high school, in which it is hoped to fit children better for their entrance to High School. "This is being done gradually in such a way that the system will be in force in all of our schools in about three years. Personally, I am inclined to favor the Junior High School System, but it would be entirely beyond our means to carry it out effectively. The great majority of our teachers are convinced from their own experience that the work of the grades cannot be done with sufficient thoroughness and efficiency in seven grades. The only misgiving I have with regard to this change is the possible conflict with the public schools and the consequent loss of pupils." #12.

- 10. Byrne, Rev. Francis J., Diocesan Superintendent (Personal Interview.)
- 11. Public Education in Virginia, Report, Richmond, 1928.F.314
- 12. Byrne, Rev. Francis J., Diocesan Superintendent (Personal Interview)

"As superintendent of the Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Richmond my duties are to act as the representative of the Bishop in all that concerns Catholic education in the diocese. This work is carried out through the organization and unification of the activities of the Catholic Schools, in order that they may accomplish their work with a maximum of efficiency. This implies supervision of the schools through periodical reports and visitations, standardization of the course of study and adoption of text books that exemplify the best and sanest thought in modern pedagogy. The professional training of the teachers also comes in for the scrutiny of the superintendent. All teachers in our schools are obliged, by diocesan regulations, to obtain certificates from the Virginia State Department of Education. It has been my purpose to inaugurate, regular teachers' meetings at which practical problems of education will be discussed by prominent educators and by the teachers themselves."<sup>#13.</sup>

Organization has been further advanced by the appointment of community supervisors. "In 1929, the superintendent wrote to the superiors of the various communities teaching in the elementary schools of the diocese, asking for the appointment

-13. Byrne, Rev. Francis J., Diocesan Superintendent (Personal Interview).

of one of the teachers on a board of community supervisors. The community supervisors have met once a year since November, 1929 with the superintendent. The principal work before them at the present time is the final adoption of an improved text book list and the revision of the elementary school curriculum for the coming year. An important work to be undertaken by the community board of supervisors is the drafting of adoption of a course of study for our elementary schools." #14. The reason for this revision is the adoption of the 8-4 plan in the Catholic Schools.

After this description of the way in which the Parochial Schools of Richmond are organized and functioned, one will be more able to understand the development of the schools from the beginning. Though in the very earliest schools there was little connection between the school and the parish. The parish did not run the school. The school was kept up by donations and small fee charged the pupils.

The first record of any Catholic school in Richmond was in 1824. I have been unable to obtain any information as to who taught the pupils, but it is thought that the founder of the school, who was a priest, did the teaching. The following is the only account which can be found regarding such a school:

-14. Byrne, Rev. Francis J., Diocesan Superintendent (Personal Interview).

Table 11. The Catholic Schools of Richmond, Virginia 1824 - 1924.

Year	School	Direction
1824	Classical School for Boys	Rev. Thomas Hore Richmond
1834	St. Joseph's School & Asylum	Sisters of Charity "
1851	School for German Catholic Children	Rev. Palhubar, S.J. "
1853	St. Mary's School for Boys	Rev. Joseph Polk, S.J."
1856	St. Peter's School for Boyd	Catholic Friends Society "
1867	St. Patrick's Parochial School	Sisters of Charity "
1886	St. Francis School - Colored	Franciscan Sisters "
1901	Cathedral School of the Sacred Heart	Srs. of Charity of Nazareth "
1909	Sacred Heart Parochial School	Benedictine Sisters So. Richmond
1911	Benedictine High School	Benedictine Fathers Richmond
1918	St. Gertrude High School	Benedictine Sisters "
1922	Cathedral Boys' School	Xaverian Brothers "
1922	St. Benedict Parochial School	Benedictine Sisters "
1923	St. Paul's Parochial School	Benedictine Sisters " "
1930	St. Elizabeth's Parochial School	Benedictine Sisters "

"In 1824, Rev. Thomas Hare, a zealous Irish priest, a native of Wexford, was sent to Richmond by the Most Rev. Ambrose Marechal, the third Archbishop of Baltimore, with the view of establishing a permanent mission here. Renting a room on the east side of Fourteenth Street, the second door north of what is known as Exchange Alley, he opened a classical school for boys, and in the same room celebrated Mass on Sunday. "<sup>#15.</sup>

It is supposed that the pupils from the little school were turned over to the Sisters of Charity at St. Joseph's School and Asylum when it began in 1834.

The beginning of St. Joseph's Academy and Orphan Asylum goes back over a hundred years to the days of Fr. Timothy O'Brien. Fr. O'Brien came to Richmond in 1832, but it was in 1834 while on a visit to Baltimore for the purpose of collecting funds for the new St. Peter's Church, which he was building, that he asked for some Sisters to take over the teaching which had already begun. "Gladly acceding to his request, Mother Rose, who was superior of the Sisters at Seaton Hall, Maryland, sent three Sisters to Richmond."<sup>#16.</sup>

"At that time the property at Fourth and Marshall Streets was occupied by a small wooden chapel, about thirty by forty feet in size, which had been built and dedicated in 1825

#15. Magri, Rev. Joseph, The Catholic Church in the City and Diocese of Richmond, p. 46.

#16. Ibid. p. 77.

as the first Catholic Church in Richmond. This was the same building in which Fr. Hore had taught school. In anticipation of the Sisters' coming, this edifice had been divided into four small rooms, and here they took up their residence." #17.

The work of the Sisters met with immediate success, so much so that the following year, 1835, Fr. O'Brien was obliged to build a brick house on the corner of Fourth and Marshall Streets, a part of the present building, as shown by the corner stone still preserved. As the years went on, the number of pupils continued to increase."The Academy was incorporated on March 27, 1848." #18.

"When Bishop John McGill came to Richmond in 1850, there were fourteen orphans at St. Joseph's and ninety pupils at the Academy, of whom about ten were boys. There were six Sisters, with Sister Rosalia as superior. During this year it was found necessary to erect a new building. Seven years later the number of orphans had grown to sixty-five. The enrollment in the Academy had increased to one hundred and twenty-five, and there were one hundred and thirty in the free school." #19.

#17. Catholic Almanac, 1853.

#18. Pamphlet - St. Joseph's Villa, 1931.

#19. Ibid.

By this time there had been two other Catholic schools started in Richmond."The school for German Catholic children, which was founded by Rev. Fr. Palhuber, S.J., from Georgetown, began in 1851. This school was to take care of the education of boys only and did not last but one year, at which time the pupils in this school were taken over by the new school for boys in the basement of St. Mary's Church."<sup>#20.</sup>

The exact number of the pupils enrolled in this school for German Catholic children is not known, but they "were the children of six hundred German families."<sup>#21.</sup>

Up until 1856 then, the Catholic children in Richmond were educated by the Sisters of Charity who taught at St. Joseph's and by Rev. Fr. Polk, who taught the children at St. Mary's parish. Fr. Polk evidently had some assistants, but no record of them can be found.

"The children at St. Joseph's paid to attend school with the exception of the orphans. The charge was \$4.00 per month tuition and \$8.00 for board."<sup>#22.</sup> Only girls attended St. Joseph's.

"The funds from the parish were used to pay for the upkeep of St. Mary's school."<sup>#23.</sup> The location of St. Mary's Church and school was on the three hundred block east Marshall Street.

#20. Magri, Rev. Joseph, The Catholic Church in the City and Diocese of Richmond, p. 93.

#21. Ibid. p. 68.

#22. Catholic Almanac - 1863.

#23. Ibid.



"St. Mary's later was turned into a school for colored children. It remained so, until 1886, when St. Francis school was opened. St. Francis' school was taught by Sisters of Charity and later by the Franciscan Sisters. This school is at present a large institution. It has enrolled about two hundred colored girls. The location is at First and Duval Streets, and is now named St. Joseph's colored school."<sup>#24.</sup>

"It was in 1886 that St. Peter's school for boys was started. The school was at first located in the basement of St. Peter's Cathedral."<sup>#25.</sup> "In 1869, a movement was started by men in the congregation for raising funds in order to erect a school building. The money was raised and a lot on the corner of Ninth and Marshall Streets was bought for \$16,000.00. However, it was not until 1873 that the school was finally built. The school grew from two hundred pupils in 1873 to six hundred in 1922 when its pupils were turned over to the New Sacred Heart School for Boys on Floyd Avenue."<sup>#26.</sup>

"The principal of St. Peter's school is Rev. Charles Van Queckelberge and is assisted by three ecclesiastical students and three ladies."<sup>#27.</sup> "It was in 1881 that the Xaverian Brothers were introduced into Richmond and took over the teaching at St. Peter's school."<sup>#28.</sup> The Xaverians were brought up from St. Peter's

#24. Kaub, Monsignor Felix F. (Personal Interview).

#25. Ibid.

#26. Ibid.

#27. Magri, Rev. Joseph, The Catholic Church in the City and Diocese of Richmond, p.110.

#28. Ibid, p. 113.

to the new Cathedral School when it opened.

"The next school to open in Richmond was St. Patrick's Parochial School. St. Patrick's began in 1867 and was taught by the Sisters of Charity." <sup>#29.</sup> The school was at first held in a rented residence on 25th Street. A year later, a lot was bought on 25th Street near the corner of Franklin Street. Here was permanently established St. Patrick's School. The following year, after raising money enough, they were able to add a wing to the school. At the present time there exists at the same location an accredited high school and a grammar school. "It was attended the first year of its existence by eighty boys and one hundred and ten girls." <sup>#30.</sup> Today the enrollment shows two hundred and eighty girls and two hundred and eleven boys. The number of boys, until the beginning of St. Benedict's High School, was somewhat larger. St. Patrick's school is a free school. It is supported by the various societies in the parish, and the parish itself.

After the building of the new Cathedral, it seemed necessary that a school should be built in that parish. "In 1901 this school was built." <sup>#31.</sup>

The money for the new Cathedral school was left to the Cathedral parish by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Fortune Ryan. The school

#29. Magri, Rev. Joseph, The Catholic Church in the City and Diocese of Richmond, p. 98.

#30. Ibid. p. 108.

#31. Kaup, Monsignor Felix F. (Personal Interview).

is located on the corner of Floyd Avenue and Morris Street."In the first years of its existence, it was attended by about four hundred girls and twenty boys." <sup>#32.</sup> This school is taught by the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, and was taught by them in the beginning. "Up until 1915, the school was open to boys through the fourth year high school. At this time the Cathedral Parish rented a house at <sup>#14</sup> North Laurel Street and started a school for boys. " <sup>#33.</sup>

This was the beginning of the Sacred Heart School for boys. The classes here ran from third year grammar school to the seventh year, inclusive. The school was taught by the Xaverian Brothers, and there was a small fee charged the pupils attending this school. The fee ran from fifty cents to a dollar a month.

In 1922, the school was changed to the corner of Floyd and Short Streets, where the new school building had been built and now stands. This year also marked the end of St. Peter's school for boys and girls. At the present time the Sacred Heart Boys' school has three hundred and fifty pupils and the grades run from the third through the eighth. Two years commercial work can also be completed at this school.

In 1912, the St. Francis school changed its name to the Van de Vyver School for Colored, and later changed to St. Joseph's school for colored. Its location, as I have stated before, is

#32. Kaup, Monsignor Felix F. (Personal Interview).

#33. Ibid.

at First and Duval Streets, and is still taught by the Franciscan Sisters.

The next school built in Richmond was built in the west end. It was opened under the name of St. Mary's Military and Classical College. It was a high school for boys. It was run by the Benedictine Fathers and was located at 309 Sheppard Street. The grounds for this school took in the block which is now surrounded by Hanover Avenue on the south, Stuart Avenue on the north, Sheppard Street on the east, and Belmont Avenue on the west.

"This school was a result of the coming of the Benedictine Fathers to Richmond, and the beginning of a new parish known as St. Benedict's." #34.

"The beginning of this school is dated at 1911. In 1915 the name was changed to the Benedictine Military College, and later, in 1929, to the Benedictine High School." #35.

The school was from the beginning a four year high school. The students paid a tuition of \$80.00 a year with fees for books and laboratory. At its beginning, the school had about thirty students, and has now grown until its student body numbers one hundred and fifty.

With the new St. Benedict's parish, two other Catholic schools were opened in the west end. One was a grammar school, and the

#34. Diehl, Fr. Cornelius, Pastor St. Benedict's Parish. (Personal Interview).

#35. Ibid.

other was a high school, for girls. Both of these schools were, and still are, conducted by the Benedictine Sisters.

The new grammar school is located on the corner of 3100 block Grove Avenue. It was built in 1922, and now takes care of the education of about four hundred Catholic children. There is no tuition fee. The school is supported by the Benedictine Parish. Prior to the building of this school, the children were taught in a building which is located next door to the school. The children were then taught by the Sisters of St. Benedict, with the assistance of some lay teachers. "So the real beginning of this school would date from 1919, when the teaching really began."<sup>#36.</sup>

"St. Gertrude's, the girls' high school connected with this parish, was built in 1918, and has never had a very large attendance. The fees are about the same as the Benedictine High School. This school is located on 3200 block Stuart Avenue. The Benedictine Sisters do the teaching of about sixty girls who attend this school."<sup>#37.</sup>

There is one other Catholic school located in what is known as South Richmond. "This school was started in 1909 and is named after the parish that supports it, the Sacred Heart Parish of South Richmond. It is located at 1418 Perry Street, and is attended by about eighty boys and about one hundred and ten girls. It was

#36. Diehl, Fr. Cornelius, Pastor St. Benedict's Parish. (Personal Interview).

#37. Ibid.

founded by the Rev. Father O'Hara. The school is conducted by the Benedictine Sisters and is a eight year elementary school." #38.

With the naming of this school, there are left only two more Catholic schools in Richmond, and the new St. Joseph's Villa located on the Washington Highway. The two other schools are St. Paul's located on Haines Avenue in Barton Heights, and St. Elizabeth's located on Fourquare Lane in Highland Park.

St. Paul's School is taught by the Benedictine Sisters. It was built in 1923, and now has a student body numbering four hundred and sixty pupils. It is a free school supported by St. Paul's parish. At the beginning, the pupils were taught in the St. Paul's Church building. The school was founded by Rev. Father O'Connell, who is pastor of St. Paul's Parish, in 1920. The school building was built in 1923.

St. Elizabeth's School is the smallest of all the Catholic schools in Richmond. Father Rowan, who is the pastor of St. Elizabeth's Church, founded this school in 1924. It is taught by lay teachers, and is a free school. The upkeep is derived from the parish. The enrollment numbers about sixty pupils, and the school was founded in 1924.

St. Joseph's Villa, of which I have previously spoken, located on the Washington Highway, was erected in 1931, and was a gift of the late James H. Dooley. This institution is every way an ideal

#38. O'Hara, Rev. Father W.A., (Pastor Sacred Heart Church, South Richmond, personal interview.)

orphanage and educational institution. The Holly Brook tract, on which the buildings of St. Joseph's Villa are erected, is about two miles north of the corporate limits of the City of Richmond. The entire property embraces two hundred and forty acres, only a small part of which is occupied by the buildings. The rest is taken up by woods, which form the southern boundary of the tract, a playground for children and a well conducted farm. On this site stand the fourteen buildings of St. Joseph's Villa. They are all of buff colored tapestry brick, trimmed with terra-cotta and limestone, and roofed with green Spanish tile. The school building is modern in every way. The class rooms are standard size with hardwood floors. On the second floor are the commercial, domestic science and sewing rooms. The school consists of a kindergarten and eight elementary grades. The high school girls are taken daily by private bus to Richmond, where they attend the Catholic High Schools.

To perfect the present organization, the cooperation of priests, teachers and Catholic laymen is necessary. Fully aware of the present conditions, the diocesan superintendent, Father Byrne, is hopeful concerning the future prospects of Catholic education in Richmond. "This same loyalty, (that of the Virginia Catholics) together with the enthusiasm and zeal of our teachers and the interest of the Bishop and his priests, are, in my opinion, the best possible guarantee that our schools will go steadily forward and upward.

I believe, therefore, that you are perfectly justified in taking an optimistic attitude about the future of Catholic education in Richmond."<sup>#39.</sup>

It would not be inappropriate to end this brief survey with an expression of appreciation of the work accomplished in the field of Catholic education in Virginia by the Rt. Rev. Andrew J. Brennan, Bishop of Richmond, through the impetus that he has given to development and organization of the Catholic School System, not only in Richmond, but throughout the State of Virginia.

#39. Byrne, Rev. Joseph , Diocesan Superintendent (Personal Interview).

END.